

Here is a painting of a rose. The photograph is one of ours, taken at Anglesey Abbey almost certainly by Sue, who is an exceptionally fine photographer. As compositions go, there is little one could do that would give a more pleasing arrangement. The bud perfectly balances the slightly asymmetric placement of the flower. The leaves are pleasingly arranged in an uncluttered gaggle around the flower and bud, with some bare earth visible as a reminder that this gorgeous flower spontaneously grew here.

The painting was done, but I was paralysed with uncertainty. I struggle with anxiety for reasons I have often talked about before, (which are documented in my story on the Under The Thinking Tree website). So I wasn't sure enough to be able to put aside all the other attempts and sign and send out this one. So I asked someone whose artistic judgement I trust completely, my daughter Hannah, who is, like a number of us in our family, herself a very competent artist.

I opened up half a dozen of the best attempts so that I could arrange them all on the screen at the same time, and we just looked at them together, talking about what we liked and disliked in each painting, and when enough dislikes had accumulated, closing down the paintings one after another until just two were left. The other painting was nearly as good, and the differences comparatively slight, but in the end, the three dimensional appearance of this one, and the way that the leaves do look like leaves, and, strangely, the slightly more pleasing colour and shape of small red blob at the top right of the painting, a fallen petal on the ground. It looks like a ruby whereas on the other painting that little curl of red looks a more garnet-like colour.

We both agreed this was the best painting. Hannah commented that you felt that if you leaned towards the flower you would catch its scent, and she is right, this particular red rose does have a scent, a beautiful scent, unlike most red rose varieties. And so a red rose, so often a symbol of love, forms the subject of a painting lovingly made by an artist with more talent than he had any reason to suspect. And that painting was lovingly chosen by that artist and his daughter, a woman now, but still forever in his mind, linked by a thread of love and care to an infant who depended absolutely upon the love and care of those adults lucky enough to have been given the task of raising her.

So love is in my mind, as I read the words of John, a man who understood love, and was fortunate enough to have been in the company of Jesus when it was possible to reach out and touch him, real flesh and blood, a real man, truly and

fully a man. John understood love because he had listened and watched and learned, for he was a disciple, the word in Greek for disciple is learner. John had learned enough about love to write a Gospel about love, which uses the word more times than the other three Gospels put together, 39 times in the New International Version of the Bible, which I happen to have open on my computer. John also wrote three letters, sometimes called epistles, which are much shorter, and yet, so permeated by love that between them, in just seven chapters, they use the word love 34 times.

And the word that John uses for love is the Greek word *agapē*, pronounced with two short 'a's and then the 'ē' pronounced as though it were written ay. And this word means the love that God has for each one of us, equally, without partiality (as Peter put it in Acts 10:34, on the day when the church changed from a Jewish Christian Church to a Christian Church for everyone.) It also means the love that we have for God, because God made us so that we can love and he made us so that because he loved us first, we can choose to love him. And this brings us back to John and his writing, because John wrote, in 1 John 4:19 'We love because He first loved us'. The He in this case being God. And twice in this chapter John tells us what he, as a disciple had learned, from spending three years in the company of Jesus, that God is love (1 John 4:8 and 6).

And that is why it is so important that we tell people about Jesus, and about God. And so I painted this rose with love, and I send it out with love. I hope and pray that today every Christian will love, through their thoughts and words and actions. For it is with love that we will move forward. It is with love that the peacemakers will end the war in Ukraine and in all the other troubled parts of the world. Love everyone because, no matter how difficult and challenging the person in front of you, God loves them exactly as much as He loves you. So, pray with love for your neighbours (Mark 12:39) and for your enemies (Matthew 5:44), as Jesus commanded us to. And shine some love into the world today, for the light has never, will never, can never, be overcome by the darkness (John 1:5). Love from Rick

Notes about the painting: There are many things I could write about the painting. It was one of several attempts to make a brushstroke-based painting using one of my favourite programs for the PC, called Dynamic Auto Painter, this one being based on a user-made configuration called Pearlescent modified to emphasise the role of the brushstrokes in making the painting. When the program had finished painting I thought that the results had potential, although it was not quite good enough to release as it stood. There was not quite enough contrast between the well-lit outer parts of the petals and those parts of the petals more deeply buried inside the flower so that it

looked like a pleasing red blob set against the contrasting pale green leaves, but it did not look strongly like a rose.

So, before I move on to trying another configuration I lavished some attention to this painting whilst it was still within the painting program. I tinkered with the intensity of the darker parts of the painting, right through the value range, making the whole painting, except for the palest regions, significantly darker, which gave an immediate improvement. The pleasing red blob was still pleasing, and there was almost enough texture and contrast to create the illusion of a three dimensional rose flower. It still lacked depth, but it was almost there.

I then utilized the ability of the painting program to treat the brushstrokes it has made as though they were real brushstrokes, with a variable thickness of paint from the point of contact of the brush through the stroke to the point where the brush left the virtual canvas. Of course, they are not real, but the computer program is able to treat them as though they were really three dimensional. I set up several lights around the top left of the painting, all pointing roughly towards the centre of the flower. I used white light, simulating the effect of a diffuse light coming from above the top left of the painting, as though it were lit by natural indirect sunlight from a skylight, or from a room light using several modern white low energy LEDs and with much of the light coming indirectly from reflections from a white painted ceiling. The results were spectacular. The painting was done.